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TRANSLOCALITY/METHODOLOGY

The Americas, or Experiencing the World

Uncertainty. This is what we abhor most. Intuitively or methodically, humankind has been seeking certainty since times immemorial. Yet, whether the point of departure for such a search is determined by dogmatic ‘truths’ of religion, the (impersonal) logic of rational argumentation, the meditative experience of transcendence, or the tangibility of empirical evidence—the shadow of the doubt never leaves us. It is, paradoxically, our most faithful companion, a trivial *sine-qua-non* condition of being human. The only formidable intelligence that exists *without* doubts—is artificial. De-humanized, non-human, in-human, Artificial Intelligence already poses ethical problems concerning agency and responsibility in the decision-making processes that affect humans. But although organizations, faceless and soulless, prefer their employees to act in a machine-like, clockwork fashion, we, unique individuals, rebel against being transformed into “human resources” (Wieczorek 2021; Wojewoda 2021). Intuitively, some of us attempt to fight back. ‘Being ourselves’ is, apparently, too important to forgo.

Apparently, because many of us will not reflect upon the choices we face when corporations upgrade their software and our PCs’ computational power fails to suffice. Or when our bank introduces a new safety measure which requires that we purchase a smartphone of a new generation if we wish to continue to do our banking online. Or when our own university chooses to assess us in terms of the parameters of efficiency (the IF, the Hirsch index, the i-10 index, etc.) rather than in terms of the quality of our insight. Nominally, it is

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all for our own good. The advertised facility and ‘objective’ safety of ‘one-click’ online transactions, ‘objectivized’ data at the foundation of ‘objectivized’ remuneration or ‘objectivized’ principles of promotion—all serve to eliminate ‘subjective’ doubt. We shrink from such a mechanized world, but we still choose to stay in it, even though it is clear that every step we take towards the compliance with the rule of the algorithm takes us further away from who we are, from who we have always wanted to be. Our own ‘subjective’ intelligence, more and more markedly attuned to the ‘artificial’ procedures, makes us depart further and further away from what we used to find fascinating in scholarship when we first embarked upon the journey of discovery (Wojewoda 2021)¹. More often than ever, today we are inclined to stick to the Wittgensteinian ‘groove,’ traveling from point A to point B, safe on the rails of the unmanned train of thought, the ‘objectivized Principle.’ A love-hate relationship, which seems to give rise to a peculiar variety of the Stockholm syndrome—we are ready to fight or even die for our freedom, but we welcome, and sometimes cherish, the oppression of the algorithm.

Perhaps this is why professorships are no longer for those whose sensitivity, life-long learning, and intellectual power allow them to expose and creatively resolve aporias, revise history, or discover mechanisms of culture central to the well-being of their fellow humans. In the perspective of an organization, a professor does not necessarily have to deserve the trust earned over years of teaching students to tackle problems unresolvable by reference to binary, or even polyvalent, logic, and to question what others take for granted. If you can demonstrate your ability to successfully apply for grants, if you are able to bring in external funds and manage your research in a fashion that allows you to produce outcome that guarantees revenue at the end of the process, if you score high in your student satisfaction surveys—you stand a very good chance of becoming a tenured faculty member. Interestingly,

1. These and many other issues related to the rule of the algorithm and the ethical problems it poses, are systematically addressed by Mariusz Wojewoda (2021) and by Krzysztof Wieczorek (2021), whose articles are due to appear in the scholarly journal *Er(r)go. Theory–Literature–Culture*, in the issue titled *machine/subject/power*, in the summer of 2021.

whatever you do to comply with the algorithm seems perfectly well-grounded. After all, it is only ethical that your salary should translate into something of value to society. If your results are of “little social or economic relevance,” should the parameters so indicate, you are not just an egotistic troublemaker—you are construed (sometimes publicly) as little more than a parasite, chasing your own ideals on someone else’s payroll. Why study counterfactuals in Old Church Slavonic? Why study musty old maps in Turkish libraries? Why spend public or private money on a wild goose chase of theoretical investigations dedicated to subjectivity, agency, or ethics? Who cares about the color of an individual sea mammal, if it cannot be quantified and translated into immediate profit? How far are we ready to depart from what brought us into academia in the first place? How convincing can we be lying to ourselves that ‘parameterization’ is indeed the final, objective solution to the problem of the ‘need of academia’?

We *hate* being colonized, but our arguments in favor of rejecting the power of the algorithm are scarce. It is, after all, a convenient, benign rule; it relieves us of responsibility; it minimizes the possibility of human error; its ‘objectivite’ dimension grants us an illusion of being a step closer to the certainty we so desperately seek.

We struggle towards a compromise, but it is not easy to resist ‘colonization for our own good.’ *RIAS* management, too, has made concessions to meet the requirements of evaluating organizations in order to qualify for the indexation in Elsevier Scopus and other impactful databases. Today, *RIAS* no longer needs to solicit contributions. Understanding the algorithm, we made sure that members of the International American Studies Association (IASA) are not forced to face the hard choice whether or not to submit texts to their own journal. Now, the standing of *RIAS* warrants its contributors the influx of parametric points, irrespective of whether they *choose* to plunge head-first into Melvillean cetology, geographical fantasies of Miguel Covarrubias, Indian dance in diaspora, Mexico’s role in the contemporary space race, transformations of culinary tastes in the Yucatán peninsula, the funding of arts in the Trump-era America, the glocality of the New England Transcendentalism, the transoceanic fates of Italian Theory, or into hundreds of other problem areas.

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But it is not the *system* that makes the decision about what we publish. It is the *community of humans* behind the scenes who will *not* reject a high-quality Americanist contribution only because it has not been intended to produce any immediate monetary outcome, or is unlikely to boost the journal's citation indices.

Yes, it is about a broadly understood philosophy of decolonization that we at IASA embrace. Yes, it is about a long-term perspective that gives credit to basic, or fundamental, research, without which no applied studies may hope to develop. Yes, it is about the concern that while international Americanists choose English as their most efficient tool of the broad transmission of information, the professional sociolects of American Studies in other languages may atrophy. And yes, it is about our belief that it is in the best interest of humankind that we forgo suspicion and open up to methodologies complementing the ones that we already take for granted. We, the humans behind *RIAS*, will always accept excellent articles in hemispheric, transoceanic, locally focused, or glocally decentered American studies, in all major languages of the Americas—and we may easily produce special issues in indigenous languages of the dual continent as long as there are enthusiastic colleagues able and willing to support us in such work. We do struggle against the aggressive 'Parametric Conquest,' and as long as we do, the power of the greedy algorithm will be kept at bay. It is IASA's essential value to never deny anyone the right to be themselves. Without inverted commas, without any need to explain their academic, or human, *raison d'être*.

This statement, however, merits a closer reflection. Attractive as they might be, fiery declarations become trustworthy only when proven to rest upon substance. One may easily find such substance in our journal's strong fundament of the ethics of friendship, which resists the hegemony of economically motivated parameters. It is on this premise that we promote language learning both within IASA and outside of it; this is why we voice the richness of multilingual perspectives by producing issues in English as well as in French, Portuguese, or Spanish. Most importantly, it is upon the fundament of friendship that methodologies rooted in cultures different from the one that gave rise to *RIAS* itself are consistently legitimized. The *Review of International American*

Studies has been conceived of as a springboard for unrestricted thinking in many languages—not only *natural languages*, but also languages of theory and cultural practice that, for centuries, have developed as parallel to those born out of the European intellectual legacy, but which eventually became glocal, owing to the historical dynamics of the evolution of the multiethnicity in the Americas and beyond. It becomes especially clear in the context of the present issue, which addresses the question of translocality in connection with indigenous knowledge systems, whose simultaneous presence in the dual American continent—perhaps like nowhere else in the world—presents an enormous potential for the future.

To use a simple example—when, in the Anglonormative world, non-professionals talk of Chinese medicine, they often construe it as a fashionable ‘spiritual alternative’ to the Western therapeutic paradigms. Yet, few Westerners fully realize how reductionist, and thereby fallacious, such thinking is, even though it is only logical that five millennia of the evolution of Chinese culture should have produced a philosophy of medicine, which, albeit based on principles alien to the western world, must be considered as fully legitimate. With the Chinese minority having become a substantial component of the tissue of the American society over the past two centuries, Chinese forms of therapy, although still in the shadow of the Western (or, more precisely, Arab) philosophy of medicine, gain their proper recognition in the Americas (and, recently, also in Europe and Australia). The concurrence of the two presents a potential which may only be realized on condition that we, cultural and literary scholars, are successful in opening our audiences’ eyes. The fact that the concept of how the human body works may differ from culture to culture should not disqualify thousands of years of *practical* experience. If ailments that our Western ways cannot address could be cured should a parallel (Chinese, Ayurvedic, or other) perspective be adopted without suspicion, why would we reject millennia of learning? Only because it requires the effort of serious study to augment one’s own, Western, perspective?

Again, the Americas are peculiar in this respect. If we agree that the products of Chinese American culture—which, in the course of the last 170 years of interaction, has evolved into a unique,

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American, phenomenon—cannot be labeled as “Made in China,” then contemporary Chinese medicine in the Americas cannot legitimately be perceived solely as an ‘import.’ Beyond doubt, phenomena such as the emergence of the American College of Traditional Chinese Medicine at the California Institute of Integral Studies testify to the fact that the once ‘exotic’ forms of therapy are now being granted a status parallel to those developed throughout the history of Western medicine. Increasingly, as translocal, they are becoming recognized as *non-foreign* elements of the glocal culture. The change in the formerly ‘isolationist mindframe’ is also visible in the increase of the popularity of international symposia dedicated to parallel forms of therapy—such as the symposium titled “Traditional Chinese and Western Medicine: What Can We Learn From Each Other,” held at the Joseph B. Martin Conference Center of the Harvard Medical School on June 20th and 21st, 2017. Phenomena of this nature evidently legitimize the value of the multi-ethnic legacy of the Americas and are welcome harbingers of change. They allow us to expect that even though many medical training institutions of ‘recognized’ status are not yet ready to expand their curricula, their faculty members will eventually discover that making the most of available traditions might produce much greater benefits than remaining locked within just one, Western, Anglonormative, library of concepts.

Similarly, the exploration of the physical world, which, to an experienced dancer of Bharatanatyam, Odissi, or any other of the dominant forms of the classical Indian dance is an obvious function of his or her own experience of the ‘body-in-the-world,’ has, translocally, opened up an altogether new space of profound understanding of ourselves in our environment. It is not about the fashionable, politically correct, ‘openness to other cultures’; it is about the opening up to a parallel meditative experience of the “bodymind,” which neither excludes nor isolates the sphere of emotions from the reality of what-is-being-experienced (Sen-Podstawska 2019). Or, to express it in terms more easily comprehensible to a Western reader, dance may prove to be a *methodology* (not just a method) serving the purpose of a more profound understanding of the complexity and unity of the universe, and a *language* to express this understanding. The translocal experience of the dance is an experience beyond

vocabulary. Non-verbal as it is, it may nonetheless inspire the development of a new language of reflection. After all, the Buddhist insights of the Beatniks, who would not hesitate to combine them with their own, Western, Transcendentalist legacy, did produce astounding effects in terms of the unfairly dubbed “countercultural” vision of the world, and, in particular, their unique, holistic, ecological ethics. It is obvious in this context to reference the famous dialogues between Albert Einstein and Rabindranath Tagore (Gosling 2007) or between David Bohm and Jiddu Krishnamurti (Krishnamurti and Bohm 2014), as well as the philosophy of Tsawalk (Atleo 2005) or the First Nations tradition of dance-as-philosophical-practice (Norton-Smith 2010). This, consequently, leads us to the very idea of the indigenous methodologies.

While indigeneity in itself is a fascinating issue—theorized by many and failed to be theorized by many more—it becomes a much more complex phenomenon when it is not addressed from the perspective of local, geographically rooted, cultures. Although historically anchored elsewhere, in diasporic contexts, transplanted indigeneity complements the local. Once it is rooted in the new soil, it becomes a component of a system of communicating vessels. First—imperceptibly, because it is exotic, incomprehensible, and potentially dangerous. Then—more and more substantially. Indigeneity in the Americas, and, more recently, in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia, although popularly associated with the legacy of Aboriginal Nations, may be argued to be as significantly translocal as it is local, its impact depending on politics and economy at a given time and place. Although their limits (and sometimes locations) may change, the ‘islands’ of indigeneity—be it First Nations, migrant diasporas, or (post/neo)colonial local majorities—may seem to lend themselves to being more or less adequately mapped. And yet, in the age of digital communications, the charting of the *impact* of their methodologies proves to be a near-impossible task. Indigeneity, in terms of its range of methodological propositions, is now glocal.

The above notwithstanding, one needs to consider how much of that glocality is actually acknowledged. While few people of the West would reject the attractions of Chinese, Indian, or Mexican cuisine, many more would experience a dilemma as to whether

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to trust a practitioner of Chinese or Indian medicine. While, translocally, few people would probably be able to resist the allure of Indian dance, many more would consider it too abstract to dedicate their time and energy to learn the philosophy upon which it is founded.

And yet, not all hope is lost. If Eugene Richard Atleo (better known by his Nuu-chah-nulth name—Umeek), the Hereditary Chief of Ahousaht, could become a Board Member of the Centre for Environmental Resources, Champion to the Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association of British Columbia, member of the Equity Committee of the Canadian Association of University Teachers and, importantly, Co-Chair of the Scientific Panel for Sustainable Forest Practices in Clayoquot Sound, and a member of the board of Ecotrust Canada, then the “communicating vessels” of local, translocal, and glocal methodologies are, technically, unobstructed. As long as we, as scholars and teachers, are strong enough to resist the ‘algorithm,’ we will be able to slowly, but surely, demonstrate to everyone willing to listen that Indian dance, First Nations’ philosophy, or Chinese medicine are important to everyone, locally and translocally alike.

As we all know, the American literature that became foundational to the Western canon came into existence only after the American intellectuals let go of their program to produce American literature understood as markedly divorced from the literature of Europe. The American Renaissance exploded when the writers and thinkers of America embraced *both*, seemingly exclusive, politically inconsistent, legacies. The new Glocal Renaissance is still ahead of us. When it arrives, it will embrace the translocal indigenous methodologies, exploding with the best that humanity has ever had to offer. We can still make it happen.

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